

Articles and Sermons :: "It is HARVEST TIME" -wilkerson

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"It is HARVEST TIME"

-by David Wilkerson.

"When he saw the multitudes, he was moved with compassion on them, because they fainted, and were scattered abroad, as sheep having no shepherd. Then saith he unto his disciples, The harvest truly is plenteous, but the labourers are few; pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he will send forth labourers into his harvest" (Matthew 9:36-38).

Jesus declared, "The fields are ripe, and the harvest plentiful. It's time to begin reaping." At that moment, the great, final spiritual harvest began. It started as a harvest among the Jews and Gentiles of Jesus' generation. And this same harvest is going to last until Christ returns. As I read this passage, I wonder: what did Jesus see in his time that caused him to say, "The harvest is ready, so now is the time to reap"? Did he see a spiritual awakening in Israel? Was there revival in the synagogues? Were priests turning back to God? Were scribes and Pharisees being convicted? What evidence was there that the harvest was ripe?

The Gospels don't reveal much evidence of any spiritual move toward God. If anything, they show the opposite. Jesus was mocked in the synagogues. The nation's spiritual leaders rejected him, questioning his integrity and divinity. One religious crowd tried to throw him over a cliff. And Christ himself upbraided Israel's cities for not repenting at his message: "Woe, Chorazin! Woe, Bethsaida! Woe, Tyre and Sidon! Woe, Capernaum!" As for the multitudes, they were embroiled in chaotic despair. Scripture tells us, "When he saw them, they were distressed and downcast, like sheep without a shepherd." Here was a society that was fearful, stressed out, depressed. The people ran about wildly, like scattered sheep, looking for help anywhere they could find it. Yet it was at this very point of great distress that Christ declared, "The fields are ripe, and the harvest is plentiful."

Do you think Jesus' words about a ripe harvest apply today? Where do we see evidence that fields are white and ready to be reaped? Are nations repenting? Is there a great stirring in our society? And is the organized church waking up? Are religious leaders hungering for revival, seeking Christ anew? Is there a cry for holiness in this generation? With few exceptions, I don't see any such things happening. Yet, none of these is what moved Jesus in his time. Rather, he was moved by the sad conditions he saw on every side. Everywhere he looked, people were overwhelmed with distress.

In fact, as Christ gazed out over Jerusalem, he wept. His tears were over the hardness and spiritual blindness he saw. Here were a people headed for judgment, with no peace, only fear and depression. And he prophesied over this scene, "Your house will

become desolate." Jesus actually gives us a picture of what the last days would look like. Now, this period began at his ascension, and it will end only when he comes again. We're getting very close to that point now. And Jesus described it to his disciples when they asked him what signs to look for. They wanted to know the condition of things as the very last days were approaching. Christ answered by speaking of famines, earthquakes, tribulations, nations divided. False prophets and false christs would deceive many and lead multitudes astray. Believers would be hated for even mentioning Christ's name. And the love of many would grow cold, with some falling away because of the bold increase of sin and lawlessness. "Upon the earth distress of nations, with perplexity; the sea and the waves roaring; men's hearts failing them for fear, and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth: for the powers of heaven shall be shaken" (Luke 21:25-26). In short, Jesus is describing here the most anxious, depressed, stressed-out generation of all time.

So, are his prophecies happening even now, before our eyes? Think about it: this generation is full of anxiety and worry. Multitudes are fearful as they watch incredible disasters unfold: hurricanes, earthquakes, tsunamis, mudslides, tornados. Entire nations tremble with fear over the threat of terrorism. And heart failure is the number-one killer in the world today. False religions, false prophets, false christs are leading many astray. Millions are turning to Islam, with nation after nation infiltrated by Islamists. You would have to be in total denial if you didn't see that everything that can be shaken right now is being shaken. In the midst of all this upheaval and turmoil, I hear Jesus' words: "The fields are white. The harvest is plentiful." I'm convinced he's telling his church, "People are ready to hear. This is the time to believe for a harvest. Now is the time for you to start reaping."

Christ is the Lord of the harvest. And if he declares the harvest is ready, we must believe it. It doesn't matter how wicked this generation becomes. It doesn't matter how powerful Satan seems to have grown. Our Lord is saying to us, "Stop focusing on the difficulties around you. Instead, raise up your eyes. It's time for you to see that the harvest is ready."

Jesus understood man's heart, knowing we forget God in times of prosperity. Christ knew that in times of distress and calamity, people are forced to face eternity. Suffering, fear and hard times ripen people for hearing and receiving the gospel. Consider the context of his words: "When he saw the multitudes, because they fainted, then saith he unto his disciples, The harvest truly is plenteous" (Matthew 9:36-37). This truth has been demonstrated throughout the history of God's people. Moses reprimanded his generation, saying, "God led you. He increased your numbers. And he greatly blessed you, giving you green fields, honey, butter, milk, sheep, oil, fruit. But you grew rich and rebelled. You lightly esteemed the Rock of your salvation, and forsook him." "But Jeshurun waxed fat, and kicked: thou art waxed fat, thou art covered with fatness; then he forsook God which made him, and lightly esteemed the Rock of his salvation" (Deuteronomy 32:15).

Scripture tells us Israel was brought low after this. Yet, in their distress, they called upon the Lord, and he delivered them: "Then

they cried unto the Lord in their trouble, and he delivered them out of their distresses" (Psalm 107:6). Consider also David's testimony: "The sorrows of death compassed me, and the floods of ungodly men made me afraid. The sorrows of hell compassed me about: the snares of death prevented me. In my distress I called upon the Lord, and cried unto my God: he heard my voice out of his temple, and my cry came before him, even into his ears" (Psalm 18:4-6). Trouble, distress and perplexity have always birthed a cry for help. This has been the pattern throughout the centuries. You remember what happened after the twin towers in New York fell: churches were packed. Prayer meetings were held in Yankee Stadium. Congressional leaders gathered on the steps of the Capitol in Washington, praying and singing, "God Bless America."

For a season, God was the talk of the nation. Fear and distress had made people think about finding truth. And that sums up the law of the harvest: THE DARKER THE DAYS, THE WHITER THE HARVEST. In Indonesia and Sri Lanka, radical Islamists had refused to allow any outsiders into their territory. But after the tsunami disaster, many opened their doors to Christian relief workers. Why? God saw fields that were white and ready to be harvested. The fact is, no country is closed to Christ. And no people are unreachable. No religious power on earth can stop the harvest. That's why Jesus tells us not to fear, even though mountains may fall into the sea.

Think about the cataclysmic events of recent world history. The Communists in Russia thought they had rid their country of God. But Jesus had said to them, "All you did was help the harvest." Christ is alive and well in Russia today. China also tried to outlaw God, only to ripen a harvest of millions of believers. Recently, the Ukraine fell out of corrupt hands, and is being led by a man who speaks of Christ. The New York Times now calls Belarus the most Communist-dominated nation on earth, yet Christians there are praying their country is next. God has seen all these fields as ready for reaping!

This same principle was true throughout Israel's history. When Moses told Pharaoh, "Let my people go," it was because God had announced harvest time. The moment had come for Israel's deliverance from captivity. But Pharaoh responded, "Who is the Lord, that I should obey his voice to let Israel go? I know not the Lord, neither will I let Israel go" (Exodus 5:2). Pharaoh represents Satan's demonic system, including false religions and oppression that hold people under bondage. Before Israel could be delivered, the powers of darkness had to be shaken. So God struck Egypt with nine natural calamities. Yet those nine disasters only hardened Pharaoh's heart. Finally, there came a calamity so devastating, everyone in Egypt - from the rulers down to ordinary citizens - knew this wasn't just nature out of control. It was God speaking. The Lord had sent an angel of death. And in one night, the eldest son in every Egyptian family died. Pharaoh's son was included among them. The very next day, Israel paraded out of Egypt. Here was the harvest that came just before judgment.

Centuries later, when Jesus announced the ripe harvest in Jerusalem, he knew judgment was about to come. Years hence, Titus and his army would invade the city, and 1.2 million people

would be killed. Many would be hung on crosses, and the city itself would be burned to the ground. This is why Jesus warned his generation, "You say there are four months before harvest. But I'm telling you, the harvest has to begin now. You have to be about the will of God, because the greatest calamity is at your door. I'm commissioning you now to finish my work. The time to start reaping is today."

How did Jesus describe the calamity that was to come? "Then shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be" (Matthew 24:21). Yet, before that calamity came, it would be time for the harvest. The concept of "harvest" was central to the church-growth movement of the 1980s. More than two decades ago, church-growth experts began focusing on new methods to bring in the harvest. They declared, "The church is no longer relevant to modern society. It's too traditional, too out of touch, and needs to be updated. We have to become more contemporary. We can no longer afford to think in small terms." So the 1980s were proclaimed to be "The Decade of Harvest." And out of this mentality was born the "seeker sensitive," mega-church movement. Almost overnight, huge churches began to spring up all over the country. Many such churches suddenly had congregations numbering in the thousands or ten thousands. Some built huge campuses resembling shopping malls, including restaurants and other conveniences.

What was called "narrow thinking" was now replaced by corporate thinking. The people's morals were no longer to be challenged. Instead, the church was to become "need-centered," ministering to people's needs as they stated them on surveys. Worship services incorporated the latest technologies, "contemporizing" the music and offering theatrical productions. Pastors illustrated their sermons with film clips from the most recent movies, some of them R-rated. It looked as if the great harvest was underway. But the "Decade of Harvest" proved to be building on the wrong foundation. A pastor named William Chadwick had led a church that thrived on these principles. But over time, he grew convicted about being so numbers-focused. He authored a book titled *Stealing Sheep*, in which he cites some alarming statistics.

The most remarkable figure was that, in ten years' time, there was no appreciable growth among evangelical churches. Instead, mega-churches were made up mostly of transfers from smaller churches. People came for the exciting new contemporary worship and the programs catering to baby boomers. Many of these "switchers" were Pentecostals. Worse, the mega-church movement had an awful effect on smaller churches. These didn't have the resources to compete with huge churches, which offered all kinds of bells and whistles with their need-centered programs. Slowly, smaller churches' numbers dwindled, and many ended up shutting their doors. A recent study by the respected Barna Research Group shows that the church isn't just stagnating, it's growing worse. One alarming fact is that fewer baby boomers are attending church than before. Simply put, the church-growth movement has ended up going backward instead of forward. Finally, there is one statistic that startles me more than any other. That is, only a minute number of Christians has ever won a soul to Christ. This brings Jesus' words up to date that "the laborers are few."

In every city where I travel nowadays, pastors ask me how to build a strong, growing church. As I look around their city, I see poor neighborhoods, teeming with downtrodden people bound by sin. I know that God has promised to empower us as ministers, if we would only go into these nearby harvest fields to reap the souls. You can build a great church with those poor and weak who are being set free from Satan's bondage. Years ago, I found the harvest to be ripe in the ghetto. It happened when I went to the neighborhoods where gang leaders, drug addicts, poor widows, alcoholics and prostitutes lived. Now, many of the most powerful soul-winners I know are former gang members like Nicky Cruz. All over the world, they're winning multitudes to Christ.

Imagine a scenario on the last day Jesus spent on the earth. Suppose that just before Jesus ascended - as he envisions the church and the harvest prior to his return - he foresees a falling away. His soul is grieved, because he sees rampant backsliding. Instead of reaping a white harvest, his people spend their time and energy seeking worldly success and material things. So Jesus says to the Father, "They won't get the harvest in. All the white fields lay dormant. I'm going to send a host of angels to do the reaping." The Father agrees, and suddenly thousands of celestial beings appear on the earth, glowing with supernatural radiance. What a sight this would be: otherworldly beings, clothed in glory, speaking in churches and in public. You see them interviewed by newspaper reporters, on the radio and on TV. They talk of the Cross, the Resurrection, the Ascension, Christ's love, and a final judgment to come. And they speak with such eloquence and conviction that everyone is enthralled. They're like so many Jonahs, wooing and warning the world.

Now suppose that after a short time, these same radiant angels become enthralled with the world around them. They're taken in by fine foods, material goods, wealth and security. And soon they start striving for success, fame and fortune. Before long, they become jealous of each other, showing anger, pride, envy and covetousness. In other words, they become just like the church today! I ask you, how much influence would they have on the world? How could they expect to bring in a harvest, being so caught up in worldliness? Their testimony would be discounted. And they would be drained of all spiritual power, going about discouraged, fearful and doubting. Tell me, why would anyone want my gospel, if they saw me in this kind of state, stressed out and joyless? Why would they believe my message, "Jesus is sufficient, my everything, my constant supply," if I'm always fearful and worried, with no peace?

No one would listen to a word I said. Instead, they'd wonder, "What difference is your Christ? He doesn't seem to be much of a physician, if you're always in this kind of condition." Beloved, our countenance counts. Listen to what Christ says of his bride, in the Song of Solomon: "O my dove, let me see thy countenance, let me hear thy voice; for sweet is thy voice, and thy countenance is comely" (Song of Solomon 2:14). Christ is saying to us, in essence, "I want to see your smile." Does that describe your countenance? There is no supposing why we don't experience a great harvest of souls. Jesus made it plain: "The harvest is ripe,

but the laborers are few." Yet, why are there so few laborers? Churches today are packed with believers who claim Christ is their very life. Millions of dollars are spent on building worship centers everywhere.

The truth is, if we're not capable of reaping souls - if our lives don't reflect the transforming power of the gospel we preach - then we have discounted ourselves as laborers. Our walk with Christ should offer proof to the world that God's promises are true. As laborers, we are the harvest instruments in the Lord's hand. In the days of Christ, such an instrument was a scythe, a long, curved, single-edged blade with a long handle. It was forged by a blacksmith, who put it into a fire, then placed it on an anvil, where he pounded and bent it into shape. Then the whole process was repeated again and again, until the cutting edge was filed with a rough-edged surface.

The parallel is clear: God is forging laborers. He isn't just pounding away at sin. And this forging process explains why the laborers are few. The majority of churchgoers are like the thousands who volunteered to go with Gideon in the Old Testament. God saw fear in many of them, knowing they wouldn't endure the fire, the pounding, the hard times. And out of the thousands who followed Gideon, only three hundred were chosen. The same thing happens today. Those who are truly called to harvest are called to endure the refining, shaping fires and the continual hammering. Yet not many do.

The disciples were empowered by God in their mission. Where did the disciples start their ministry? According to this passage, Jesus sent them to the distressed, the poor, those who were bowed down with sin, bondages and life-controlling habits. I think of the Teen Challenge drug and alcohol rehabilitation ministry, with its 500 centers worldwide. And I think of scores of other reapers who have gone to other countries and seen miracles of salvation as they've ministered to the neediest, poorest, most devil-bound people. They're starting to reap exactly where Jesus started his harvest: among the lost sheep, the captives, the brokenhearted, the prisoners, the lepers, the blind, the poor, those who mourn, those with a spirit of heaviness, those who are distressed and disconcerted.

Consider Paul's words: "Ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called: but God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; and base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not. that no flesh should glory in his presence" (1 Corinthians 1:26-29).

Dear saint, Jesus knew what we were going to face in these last days: a generation steeped in sin far more than any other. stress and loneliness such as has never been experienced by man. financial disasters, rampant divorce, militant homosexuality, immorality that would bring a blush to even the worst sinners just thirty years ago. This is why Christ seeks laborers who have submitted to the fires and forgings. He wants a people who'll stand before the world and proclaim: "God is with me! Satan can't stop me. Just look at my life. I've been through fire after fire, pounded

again and again. But I've come through it all more than a conqueror through Christ, who lives in me. What I have preached has worked for me. I am living proof Jesus is all-sufficient!"

Re: "It is HARVEST TIME" -wilkerson, on: 2005/11/11 23:34

This burns in my heart.

Quote:
-----Christ is the Lord of the harvest. And if he declares the harvest is ready, we must believe it. It doesn't matter how wicked this generation becomes. It doesn't matter how powerful Satan seems to have grown. Our Lord is saying to us, "Stop focusing on the difficulties around you. Instead, raise up your eyes. It's time for you to see that the harvest is ready."
